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ABSTRACT

The principal aim of community work-education councils is to make the transition between the worlds of education and work more rational through a deliberative, collaborative process of public and private interests and initiatives. A cross section of the community must work together as peers in a flexible give and take spirit. Councils should avoid exotic or macroscopic problems. Articulation of a set of specific prioritized problems is a productive way to begin. The prerequisites and steps in the development of community work-education councils includes (1) propitious community climate, (2) optimum participation and representation of community interests, (3) informal idea-swapping and bread-breaking, (4) issue discernment and enumeration, (5) forming an ad hoc working committee, (6) goodwill building, (7) goal formulation, (8) building and sustaining commitment, (9) establishing a formal work-education council, and (10) ongoing issue discernment and goal formulation. (CSS)

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On Developing Community Work-Education Councils

by Karl A. Gudenberg

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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THE WORK-EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

The Work-Education Consortium is a collaborative initiative of communities organizing themselves to assist youth in their transition from school to work. Several national organizations (the National Manpower Institute, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, and the National Alliance of Businessmen) are dedicated to supporting the activities of those communities. The Consortium is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and operates in consultation with representatives from the Departments of Labor, HEW, and Commerce.

In the Consortium communities, substantial efforts have been made to involve institutional constituencies in youths' development. Various combinations of educators, business people, union members, employment and training agency representatives, local government officials, service agency representatives, parents, and youth *participate* through a council in smoothing the transition from school to work. They represent a diversity of characteristics and a variety of approaches to resolving youth transition problems. Each is trying innovative methods of relating education and work through councils with different sources of community leadership. Collectively they have expertise and experience that can provide models for others.

The sponsoring organizations serve the Consortium by providing technical assistance through on-site visits, workshops, and the written word; by facilitating access to technical and funding resources at the federal level; by arranging for the provision of additional expert assistance; and by acting as an intermediary between the Consortium communities and the federal agencies.

The Consortium Project represents a significant departure from traditional patterns of federal government/local community interaction. This project, and several of the concepts being tested through it (collaboration, community education-work councils, the use of an intermediary organization), are more fully described in other publications available from the National Manpower Institute.

The work reported herein was performed in connection with a contract with the U.S. Department of Labor (No. 99-6-653-42-8). The opinions expressed are those of the author and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the U.S. Government.

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INTRODUCTION

Karl Gudenberg is a Program Officer at the National Manpower Institute, working primarily with the Work-Education Consortium Project. The Project is a response to the need for better mechanisms at the local level to help young people move between school and work, including improved community involvement in youth development, better employer-school relations, and opportunities to combine work or service experience with classroom learning. The purpose of the Project is to assist work-education councils, made up of representatives from education, employment, labor unions, local government, service agencies and other community organizations, to develop local youth policies and to serve their communities by encouraging the implementation of their policy recommendations. The Work-Education Consortium Project is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and operates in consultation with the Federal Interagency Steering Committee on Education and Work, made up of representatives of the Departments of Labor; Health, Education, and Welfare; and Commerce.

As a Program Officer, Mr. Gudenberg has participated with the rest of the Project staff in visiting and reviewing some 50 communities across the country, of which 21 were selected for participation in the National Manpower Institute's Work-Education Consortium. He is currently working to provide technical assistance to a number of these communities in their efforts to make their work-education councils viable catalytic agents in their communities. This paper represents Mr. Gudenberg's thoughts on the development of community work-education councils - from the importance of a climate of receptivity to the council concept, to balanced representation on a council, council organization and goal formulation, and ongoing issue discernment.

ON DEVELOPING COMMUNITY WORK-EDUCATION COUNCILS

The principal aim of Community Work-Education Councils is to make the transitions between the worlds of education and work more rational through a deliberative, collaborative process of public and private interests and initiatives. These Councils are primarily catalytic in nature, involved in the inspiration and cementing of community resolve, in the springing loose and orchestration of community action, and in the coordination of information and mechanisms that maximize the delivery of effective existing youth programs and services and minimize their duplication.

The collaborative process in which Community Councils are involved requires the participation of a cross-section of community interests which include, but are not limited to industry, business, labor, education, government, social service institutions, and individuals. A number of these participants have traditionally assumed adversary roles, e.g., industry and labor, but within the Council it is important that all participants be and consider themselves to be peers and feel comfortable in this relationship. A climate, vehicle, and format that will make this kind of relationship possible is vital.

At the same time, it is important for all segments of the community participating in the Community Work-Education Council to be mindful of their own particular needs as they pertain to the transitions of youth between education and work. Representatives want to know their participation is accruing a measure of gain for their own group, or the value of their participation both to themselves and others will be dubious.

Councils have to be flexible and involved in an evolving process of issue and problem identification and resolution, for which a spirit of give-and-take is essential. A certain measure of catharsis, even some conflict, in initial deliberations should not only be expected, but encouraged. A growing sense of awareness among diverse members involved in the collaborative process as to who they are, what their needs and wants are, their style, their commitment, etc., is essential.

Goodwill and community spirit are needed, but not as cosmetic public relations palliatives. Councils should avoid dealing with exotic or "attention getting" issues and problems, problems that are not personally felt by those community interests participating in the collaborative process; long-term goodwill will be built by addressing issues and problems that require resolution by as broad a cross-section of community interests as possible.

Councils should also avoid dealing with macroscopic problems that defy resolution. An articulation of a limited set of specific problems, their nature and scope, and the ways and means of their collaborative

resolution in terms of priorities is a productive way to begin, assuring that only those problems for which realistic resolutions are probable through the Council mechanism will be addressed.

Several elements seem to be essential in the development of Community Councils. They appear to be sequential but are not always; each community will seek its own developmental path. Each community has its own idiom, and the involvement of its particular relevant community interests in the indigenous development of form and substance is vital.

A discussion of the prerequisites and steps in the development of Community Work-Education Councils follows and includes:

- Propitious Community Climate
- Optimum Participation and Representation of Community Interests
- Informal Idea-Swapping and Bread-Breaking
- Issue Discernment and Enumeration
- Forming an Ad Hoc Working Committee
- Goodwill Building
- Goal Formulation
- Building and Sustaining Commitment
- Establishing a Formal Work-Education Council
- Ongoing Issue Discernment and Goal Formulation

Propitious Community Climate

A collaborative approach to the education-to-work transition is most likely to occur when certain conditions exist in a community -- when a relatively high level of awareness regarding the extent and nature of education-to-work transition problems is evidenced by a cross-section of relevant community groups. Such awareness would be an outgrowth of the involvement of industry, labor, education, et al., with these problems on a day-to-day basis. Their initial involvement might be the result of a crisis situation, but crisis intervention efforts must be accompanied by other efforts that deal more fundamentally with root causes and generally require more prolonged and involved efforts and an awareness of the differences between short- and long-range goals.

The dimensions of transitional problems will be well understood, if not by all relevant groups in a community, at least by some, and their capacity and willingness to share such understanding should be a likely probability.

Optimum Participation and Representation of Community Interests

The education-to-work transition touches and affects every member and sector of the community. In order to make this transition more rational, all relevant interests in the community need to be marshalled into a collaborative effort by the Council. The representation on a Council should include leaders from industry, commerce, labor, education, government, appropriate social service delivery systems, and advocacy groups comprising persons disconnected from these sectors. (It might be advanced that those persons who have sons and daughters in the transitional stages between the worlds of education and work are often the most acutely sensitive to the problems and the most willing to work toward the development of more options for a rational transition process.)

Representative groups and leaders should be willing and anxious to devote time, commitment, and resources toward the creation of a formal Council. This can be a problem because in every community there is a cadre of leaders who serve on a host of deliberative bodies and many are over-extended, resulting in their diminished effectiveness. Care must be taken to find leaders whose personal and groups' interests are served through participation on a Council. The current widespread interest in and perception of education-to-work transition difficulties should make the task of involving community leaders in a Council relatively easy.

The organizing nexus should include as many relevant interest groups as possible. Exclusion of certain groups may sometimes occur because of their image, either real or imagined, because of traditionally assumed roles, or because they wish to maintain a separate identity with different pursuits.

Councils need representatives who are the "movers and shakers" within their organizations and community or at least are closely connected to such persons with their concurrence and active backing. They cannot be message carriers or information gatherers per se, but need to have the authority and commitment to plan and actively generate the movement necessary for goals to be implemented. If their involvement in Council affairs can be characterized as a symbiosis of self-serving and Council-serving motives and actions, so much the better.

As was mentioned earlier, there may be adversary roles and relationships between certain groups in a community that require change in order for constructive dialogue to begin. If such relationships are traditional and firmly established, it should be possible for a strong third party to be instrumental in bringing these groups together and generating desirable

changes in attitudes. This can flow out of awareness building, which may take more time than appears warranted, but is fundamental to any collaborative process. Adversaries can become aware of the commonality of their problems through involvement with other community groups and recognition of common problems can lead to their resolution.

Collaborative efforts of Councils go beyond simply cooperative ventures. Collaboration suggests involvement in actions for which responsibility and accountability are shared. It does not suggest plans made by one, executed by another, and evaluated by still someone else.

The membership of a Council should be relatively small and select, probably not exceeding 15 members initially. These members should view themselves as peers so that unequally perceived roles and relationships do not cause divisiveness.

Regular (and purposeful) meetings should be held at which Council members feel free to discuss and determine agenda. Points of disagreement cannot be swept under the rug; they only reemerge later to haunt and impede Council deliberations.

The style of the Council will be self-evolving. In some instances the creation of its own style provides different representatives an opportunity to become part of a "new" thing, thus avoiding the diffuculties of acceding to an incompatible style.

Informal Idea-Swapping and Bread-Breaking

The bringing together of relevant representatives of a cross-section of community interests can be accomplished in a number of ways. In some cases an influential individual or group is concerned with heightening community awareness of the transition process, and will act as initiator of a collaborative effort. In other instances groups or organizations that have a particular stake in the transition process may be instrumental as an organizing nexus. Organizers may also be a "third party;" they may have a stake in the process but have traditionally played secondary and tertiary roles.

Informal idea-swapping is often accomplished in a setting of "bread breaking" in sessions that are concerned with building awareness. These sessions serve not only to elevate awareness of the problems confronting all the participants, but will result in recognition of the issues as well as ways and means of addressing them. Early sessions should not, however, result in total blueprints for action; such blueprints will evolve through free and unfettered group involvement in decisionmaking.

It is through such informal sessions that it is possible to determine whether or not a movement toward a collaborative process should be undertaken in increasingly formal ways.

Issue Discernment and Enumeration

Each participating group or organization should be involved in the articulation of a limited number of concerns vital to their own well-being and survival. These issues must also, however, be viewed in terms of their linkages to other groups, and the ramifications of their interrelationships must be featured and understood. It is through such a process that individual interests can be tempered and fitted into a constellation of Council interests.

The enumeration of issues and setting of priorities should be derived through mutual, evolving deliberation and consent. An ongoing process of issue discernment and enumeration must then be maintained. Key issues must be carefully chosen and deliberately dealt with so that this process does not result in the immobilization of Council efforts due to a lack of focus. The effect of taking action to address key issues will be to provide new insights as to emphasis, extent, and manner of dealing with their resolution and the resolution of other related issues.

Forming an Ad Hoc Working Committee

An Ad Hoc Working Committee, which could correspond to the Executive Board of a formal Council, might be formed to begin developing goals, as well as tactics and strategies for their implementation.

The mix of Committee members is crucial, since such a committee may be the precursor of a formal Work-Education Council and as such sets the mood and tenor. Although the level and type of participation may change at a later time, the representativeness of relevant community sectors at this early stage must be given considerable attention. If the weighting is too one-directional it may exclude potentially vital participants.

Careful choice of leaders is also important. It has been observed that the administrative leadership of a Work-Education Council is probably as important as the policy-setting leadership. If and when the head of the Ad Hoc Working Committee, because of his/her ability, energy, and commitment, is also available to head the Work-Education Council, so much the better. In many cases, however, one of the principal tasks of the Ad Hoc Working Committee is to find a talented executive director for the formal Council - not an easy task.

Working Committee members will want to pursue particular areas of responsibility including building goodwill; determining the amount and degree of support particular ideas will generate; determining the commitment of participating members; and ascertaining the likelihood of generating resource support, i.e., funds, services, equipment, space, and/or staff.

In addition, an Ad Hoc Working Committee will want to inventory general and specific community resources making certain it is familiar with all relevant agencies, organizations, and groups in the community. The particular capacities of community groups, their willingness to be tapped, and the most effective ways of tapping them should be ascertained. Many potentially involved groups require the weight of well-conceived theoretical frameworks or perspectives before considering participation. Others are more interested in how to divide tasks relevantly between various participating organizations. Whenever possible, the resources of the immediate community should be tapped first, but with attention to the availability of extra-community resources on regional, state, and even national levels.

Goodwill Building

At the outset, the building of goodwill should concentrate on establishing a climate within a community that encourages groups to come together to collaboratively work toward the alleviation of youth's transition problems by changing their will and capacities for the individual and common good. It is necessary to create a climate that permits a forthright process of dialogue in which the advantages of mutually airing problems in order to find solutions are understood, a climate in which antagonist and protagonist are encouraged to interact and evolve mutual goals and actions. Participants will want to be held accountable for their inputs and have a stake in the outcomes.

The process may take longer than appears necessary and desirable, but the working out of differences, both substantive and stylistic, must occur. This usually requires the opportunity for participants to have time to know one another in order to build fruitful working relationships.

General community goodwill and visibility will come much later and should be based on real, identifiable accomplishments. Cosmetic goodwill, that does not hold up when tested, or a series of public relations gestures will not build a solid base of community commitment and will not permit the Council to become a catalytic change agent in the community.

Goal Formulation

Councils are forced to deal simultaneously with immediate as well as more long-term goals. The enormity of the problem of the education-to-work transition has in some cases produced divisive approaches. When crisis intervention efforts exclude more long-range preventive efforts, criticisms that such efforts are lacking in long-term effects are common. Conversely, when long-range goals are developed to the exclusion of addressing pressing immediate needs, such efforts are perceived as ephemeral.

It is especially important that initial goals, both short- and long-term, be met successfully and that they increase the resolve and commitment of participants to collaborate more intensely and expansively. It is also important that participants be able to identify their role and part in the goal setting and achievement with the major share of the success being attributable to their inputs. The Council's role should be perceived as facilitator and coordinator, the cementing agent responsible for the individual successes of participants' inputs.

Goals should be periodically reassessed and expanded or changed as indicated, as part of the ongoing, evolving and deliberative process of the Council.

Building and Sustaining Commitment

Commitment to collaborative planning and action should undergo continuous regeneration and be sufficiently strong to give impetus to any and all goals evolved and actions taken. However, it is also important to realize that different groups can be involved in the collaborative process with different levels of commitment. The orchestration of such efforts becomes a difficult but necessary ongoing process. Perception of the relative commitment of particular groups at any given time and with regard to specific concerns and endeavors is important to achieving collaboration.

Some groups demonstrate a high degree of commitment during their initial involvement, which may flag if they are overly extended or relied upon. Other groups have more singular concerns and when and if such are resolved, their commitment may lessen. Some will become committed only when and if certain measurable progress is observable. Declining commitment can often be avoided by presenting participating groups with appropriate choices and levels of involvement.

It is important to assess the commitment of participants in order to determine what and how things can be done to revive flagging commitment or to inspire a new sense of commitment.

Establishing a Formal Work-Education Council

Ideally a Work-Education Council is an independent, not-for-profit, policymaking and change-executing agent in the community. It is a formal organization with the declared purpose of making youth's transition from education to work more rational.

Councils are generally served by a policymaking body -- a board of directors; and an administrative staff -- executive director and support secretarial staff. Some Councils also have an advisory board that serves the Council in a "friend and support" capacity.

The board of directors should be a relatively small (approximately 15 members) group of active representatives of all relevant sectors of the community. In some cases a board is served well by co-chairpersons, particularly when several principal sectors of the community require equal representation (e.g., management and labor).

The administrative arm of a Council is critical. It is a rare Council that functions effectively without a resourceful, dynamic executive director. In some ways this person is the keystone since his or her function is policy execution but in many ways is also policy shaping.

In many cases the need for statements of purpose and guidelines for action and conduct results in a constitution and by-laws. Such guiding principles for plans, actions, and organizational structure and behavior should be carefully developed and periodically revised.

Commitment to the Council can in part be measured by the local resources offered to sustain it. Such resources must not be from so singular a source as to make the Council the captive of any particular interest; a system of equally shared responsibility of Council members for obtaining resources should be arrived at. Some resources may come from extra-community sources in addition to the local resource base, although for long-term support a Council must rely primarily on local resources.

Ongoing Issue Discernment and Goal Formulation

A Work-Education Council needs to be involved in an ongoing process of issue discernment and goal formulation that is responsive to the mood and temper of changing situations and times and anticipates and moves toward the prevention of problems.

It is important, however, that a Council not become ineffective because it becomes too change oriented. Original goals and actions should be carefully conceived and vigorously pursued so that they form the basis for a rational sequence of evolving goals. Departure from that sequence should occur only when significant changes in circumstances, brought about by Council efforts or otherwise, make it necessary.

The Council must deal with reasonably attainable short- and long-range goals. Realized goals are crucial; they provide the most cogent impetus for growing resolve and action by a Council, and form the basis for the generation of positive public awareness of Council activities.

* * *

Each of the steps in the growth of a Community Work-Education Council discussed here could obviously be developed at much greater length.

However, this paper is not intended to be a complete "how to" manual, but rather the author's observations of what seems to work, based on experience with the National Manpower Institute's Work-Education Consortium communities, many of which were in the early months of development at this writing.

THE NATIONAL MANPOWER INSTITUTE

The National Manpower Institute is a private nonprofit institution concerned with the full development and use of the human potential through the development of integrated education, manpower, and economic policies that break down the time traps of youth for education, adulthood for work, and retirement for obsolescence.

Currently, NMI is involved in a number of policy, research, and demonstration projects, one of which is the Work-Education Consortium Project. NMI supports its activities through grants, contracts, and contributions.